



U.S. Army Europe Command Sgt. Maj. David S. Davenport Sr. (second from left), leads a group of junior noncommissioned officers and specialist on a staff ride in the area of the 1944 battles for the Siegfried Line in Germany. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Susan Noga)

# Staff Ride Connects History to Present-Day Battles for NCOs in Europe

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**U**.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) has used its location — headquartered at Wiesbaden, Germany — to conduct leader-training using historical battles and the staff ride training model for years. For most of that time, staff rides were either conducted for units or senior leaders. Recently, however, Command Sgt. Maj. David S. Davenport Sr., USAREUR command sergeant major, and the USAREUR Military History Office took 21 junior noncommissioned officers (NCOs)

and specialists to the area of the 1944 battles for the Siegfried Line and used the staff ride's time-proven techniques to train the future leaders of the Army.

Staff rides, during which Soldiers study important battles while visiting the actual locations of those battles, are a unique and persuasive method of conveying lessons of the past to present-day Army leadership. When properly conducted, this training experience brings to life examples of leadership, tactics and strategy, communi-





Sgt. 1st Class Edward Jervis (left) and Lt. Col. Richard Towner (right) view WWII historical documents and photographs with Lidy Gabriel, a WWII role player, at a privately owned WWII Memorabilia Museum in Roynac, France, as Operation Anvil-Dragoon was discussed May 30, 2018. Anvil-Dragoon was the campaign to take Southern France August 15, 1944. Junior and senior leaders from the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany, participated in a battle staff ride, which retraced the actual landing spots and troop movements in Southern France, May 27 – 31. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. David Overson)

cation, use of terrain and, above all, the mindset of men in battle on the very terrain where historic encounters occurred. This historical study offers valuable opportunities to develop professional leadership. The staff ride concept is not only a training opportunity — it also paves the way for innovative, confident, and competent leaders. In planning the first junior enlisted Soldier Staff Ride in USAREUR, Davenport understood just that.

The creation of the junior enlisted ride happened during a senior leader ride to Normandy, France, 2014. During the last dinner of that event, former commanding general of USAREUR, retired Lt. Gen. Donald M. Campbell Jr., hosted historians Andrew N. Morris and John A. Glover, along with Davenport. Together they discussed additional training possibilities, including the concept of conducting an “NCO ride.” As the plan was refined, Davenport chose to focus on junior NCOs to help build and empower junior leaders.

With the assistance of the USAREUR historians and other support staff, Davenport planned and executed the staff ride, maximizing professional development at every opportunity. The staff ride concept can be complex, and until this point had only been executed by officers.

Davenport selected Command Sgt. Maj. Wardell Jefferson, command sergeant major of the USAREUR Non-commissioned Officer Academy; Command Sgt. Maj. James J. Murrin, command sergeant major of the 7th Civil Support Command; and Command Sgt. Maj. Rod-

ney J. Rhoades, command sergeant major of the 21st Theater Support Command, as senior mentors. Davenport also arranged for 21 specialists and sergeants – all of who were either Soldier or NCO of the Year candidates from across USAREUR – as participants. To emphasize that we are “one Army,” Davenport assigned one Army Reserve Soldier to each group of Soldiers, exposing active duty Army Soldiers to Army Reserve Soldiers and their career experiences.

While the junior leaders and senior mentors were being selected, the USAREUR historians were developing the study curriculum. The Soldiers and mentors who participated were assigned to read, *The*

*Siegfried Line Campaign*, by Charles B. MacDonald, the former deputy chief historian for the U.S. Army. The book detailed both sides of the famous battles, highlighting decisions that led to advancement as well as setbacks. Aachen, Germany, the site selected for the staff ride, provided the facilities needed for staff ride members to study, have breakout sessions, and experience the challenging terrain. This allowed for an accurate remembrance of what Soldiers endured in 1944.

Each group was divided into parts to study the infantry units of the battle, to include the experiences of the 9th Infantry Division in the Hürtgen Forest, September 1944, the 1st Infantry Division’s capture of Aachen, October 1944, and the 28th Infantry Division’s attempt to take the town of Schmidt, November 1944. The preliminary study phase for this ride also consisted of guided readings, followed by three video teleconference sessions outlining how the staff ride would be conducted, expectations for each participant, and, using a Fort Leavenworth battle analysis outline to brief each unit’s role in the battle.

The preliminary study phase ended in August, giving way to the field study phase in September. The intent was to visit the significant sites of the Siegfried Line Campaign emphasized during the preliminary study. As only a portion of the field locations could be visited, the instructor team of Davenport, senior mentors, and the historians summarized what occurred elsewhere so that



students were able to comprehend the entire campaign.

The route through the sites were in chronological order of the campaign so Soldiers and mentors could discuss events as they unfolded. Each stop, called a stand, was selected for historical significance, visual impact, and logistical necessity. A few of the Soldiers studied topics beyond general background knowledge, so the stops provided opportunities for members to share their findings and stimulate discussion.

### Day Zero

Day zero of the USAREUR Junior Enlisted Staff Ride field study started out with all members taking a bus ride to a hotel in Zweifall, Germany, near Aachen. At the hotel, Soldiers and mentors prepared and refined their presentations within their respective groups for their stand presentations the next day. All previous meetings and briefings were conducted through video teleconference, so day zero gave the Soldiers and mentors a chance to combine efforts to make their briefs a memorable learning experience.

### Day One

Day one started at the point where the VII Corps crossed into Germany in September 1944, near the town of Schmidthof, in the Stolberg Corridor. After viewing the remains of the West Wall, the group traveled to Schevenhutte, where group A introduced the 9th Infantry Division's actions. The stand was at the site where the 47th Infantry Regiment encountered the lead elements of the German 12th Infantry Division. Throughout the day, Group A discussed observation and fields of fire, avenues of approach, key terrain, obstacles, and cover and concealment (OAKOC) from the German perspective, plus the vehicles used and the Soldiers' morale. The group also discussed advancement across the battle space and how they would do things differently or not. They also discussed the importance of building strong bonds before going to war and how to maintain those relationships during war. Davenport and the senior mentors stressed the importance of reconnaissance and rehearsals at every stand.

Day one ended with an integration session, discussing the events of the day, lessons learned, and

how those lessons can be applied today. A short after action review (AAR) session concluded the evening.

### Day Two

Day two began with a walk along the Weisserweh, a small creek the 9th Infantry Division attacked across in early October 1944, while attempting to get to the town of Schmidt. This allowed the Soldiers to see the remains of a company rear area, and experience the steep terrain



U.S. Soldiers and officers from the 30th Medical Brigade walk a steep trail used by Sherman tanks in the battle during their annual staff ride in Aachen, Germany and Hurtgen Forest in on February 13, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Robert Fellingham, 30th Medical Brigade)

and harsh tree cover. The afternoon switched to the actions of 1st Infantry Division as they fought to isolate and take the city of Aachen. There were three stands on the second day, where group B discussed OAKOC and the mission variables of mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations, and how difficult it is to advance in battle when the enemy knows your tactics. Davenport

brought up the topic of integrating Soldiers in a unit and how that affects the unit in war. Soldiers then gave examples of how they would integrate a Soldier into their unit if they were a team leader or squad leader. The comments marked a turning point in the staff ride, as Soldiers became more vocal from that point forward.

Day two ended with an integration session and dinner, highlighted by the attendance of retired Lt. Gen. Campbell, former USAREUR commanding general. The Soldiers appreciated that senior leaders took the time to mentor them and being available for candid conversation to enhance their professional development. Campbell discussed his priorities and solicited support and feedback from the junior Soldiers.

### Day Three

Day three started with the town of Vossenack and the beginning of the November attacks by the 28th Infantry Division to take Schmidt. The walk followed the Kall Trail down a steep, narrow path across the Kall River to the town of Komerscheid. Discussion topics were about overcoming difficult terrain, medical issues, rear area security, and leadership under difficult conditions. During the last stand, Davenport expressed the importance of being knowledgeable, comfortable, and available as a leader. "Soldiers must be knowledgeable about their skill sets, comfortable talking with their Soldiers, and available for their Soldiers to come to you with any problem," Davenport said. Soldiers discussed how they could show genuine care for their Soldiers. Day three concluded with a final integration session and award presentation before heading back to their home stations.

The Army Values were discussed at every stand. During the presentations, senior mentors explained the foundation and history of Army the principles. Jeffer-

son discussed how Army values are an integral part of the curriculum at the USAREUR Noncommissioned Officer Academy.

"It's important to address the Army values in our daily discussions with Soldiers," Jefferson said. "We conduct values-based Physical Readiness Training (PRT) at the NCO Academy. Every three days, we discuss a different value, and the culmination is a discussion right after the cool-down for the Thursday morning PRT session. Having discussions like these with our Soldiers increases the probability of them learning and living the values."

Davenport said Army leadership asks junior Soldiers to memorize an abundance of information for promotions boards, Soldier of the Month Boards, and NCO boards, but that the Army lacks hands-on training and showing Soldiers the significance of their study. This enlisted staff ride provided a foundation to understand land navigation, pre-combat checks, pre-combat inspections, reconnaissance, rehearsals, nine line medevac, call for fire, The Soldier's Creed, and the Creed of the Noncommissioned Officer.

Empowering junior leaders was one of the overarching themes of the staff ride. According to the final AAR comments that goal was achieved, as all Soldiers said they would recommend the opportunity to their peers and subordinates because it improved their leadership style. Another goal of the staff ride was for Soldiers to take the lessons of the past and apply them to future strategic battle planning. And a unique learning aspect of the staff ride was that Soldiers played multiple roles as team leader, squad leader, and even officer ranks as they gave their briefings at each stand, explaining how they would have made decisions based on each rank.

The USAREUR Junior Enlisted Staff ride was an overwhelming success and marked a turning point in

the lives of 21 Soldiers. Walking the trails, hills, and rugged terrain of the Soldiers who fought in 1944 made each Soldier realize the importance of team effort and why training must be executed to standard. Repetition in training leads to confidence, and confidence leads to mastery. This staff ride empowered competent and confident junior leaders and set the stage for additional training opportunities on talent management while contributing to the life-long learning of the Soldiers. ■



Army University Press Staff Ride Team Chief and Historian Kevin Kennedy, explains the Battle of the Rosebud near one of the many battlefield markers to Command and General Staff College students during a Sioux Wars staff ride in Big Horn County, Mont., May 4, 2018. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Mark A. Moore II)



# Educational Services

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## Staff Ride Army University Press

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# Field Staff Ride Program Offerings

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Educational-Services/Staff-Ride-Team-Offerings/>

## Staff Ride Offerings

Click on this button below to display the complete list of field offerings or zoom in and click on a marker. Red markers correspond to the American Revolution. Blue markers correspond to the American Civil War. Yellow markers correspond to Indian Wars. Green markers are other miscellaneous wars and battles.

Staff Ride Program Offerings

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